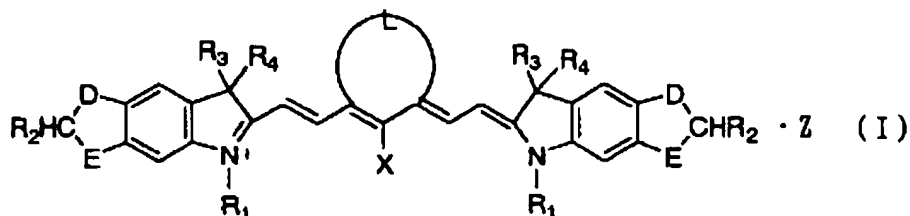


AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Pending) A polymethine compound which has the following general formula:



wherein R_1 represents an alkyl group, which may optionally be substituted, R_2 represents a hydrogen atom or a lower alkyl group, R_3 and R_4 each independently represents a lower alkyl group or R_3 and R_4 may combinedly form a cyclic structure, L is an alkylene group which is required for the formation of a cyclic structure and may optionally be substituted, one or more carbon atoms of which cyclic structure may be replaced by some other atom(s) or atomic group(s), D and E each independently represents an oxygen atom or a methylene group, X represents a hydrogen or halogen atom or a substituted amino group, and Z represents a charge-neutralizing ion.

2. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1, wherein R_1 is an alkyl group containing 1 to 8 carbon atoms, an alkoxyalkyl group containing, as a whole, 2 to 8 carbon atoms, a sulfoalkyl

group containing 1 to 8 carbon atoms or a carboxyalkyl group containing, as a whole, 2 to 9 carbon atoms.

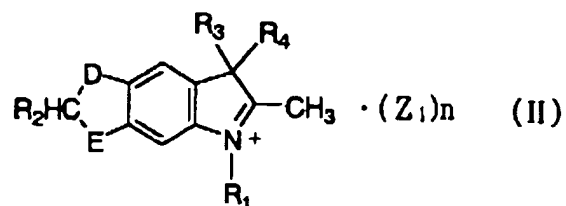
3. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein L is an alkylene group containing 2 to 4 carbon atoms.

4. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1, wherein Z is Cl^- , Br^- , I^- , ClO_4^- , BF_4^- , CF_3CO_2^- , PF_6^- , SbF_6^- , CH_3SO_3^- , a p-toluenesulfonate ion, Na^+ , K^+ or a triethylammonium ion.

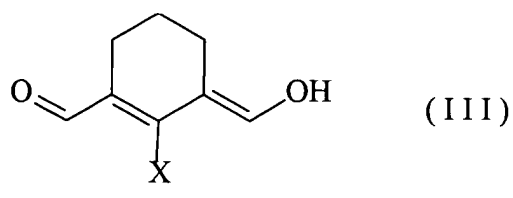
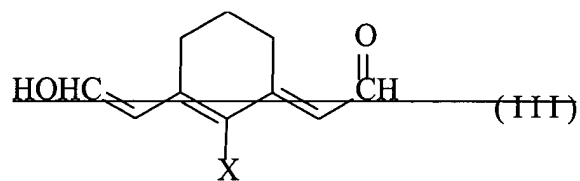
5. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein each of R_3 and R_4 is a methyl group or R_3 and R_4 combinedly form a cyclopentane or cyclohexane group together with the carbon atom to which they are bound.

6. (Pending) A polymethine compound as claimed in claim 1 wherein X is H, Cl, Br or a diphenylamino group.

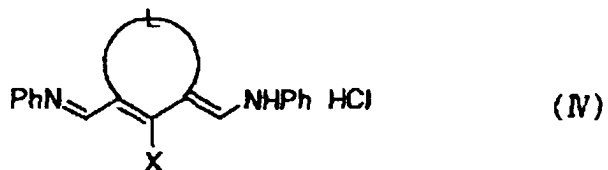
7. (Amended) A method of producing the polymethine compound of claim 1 which comprises subjecting an indolenium compound represented by the general formula (II):



wherein R_1 represents an alkyl group, which may optionally be substituted, R_2 represents a hydrogen atom or a lower alkyl group, R_3 and R_4 each independently represents a lower alkyl group or R_3 and R_4 may combinedly form a cyclic structure, D and E each independently represents an oxygen atom or a methylene group, Z_1 represents a charge-neutralizing ion and n represents an integer of 0 or 1, and a diformyl compound represented by the general formula (III):



wherein X represents a hydrogen or halogen atom or a substituted amino group and L is an alkylene group which is required for the formation of a cyclic structure and may optionally be substituted, one or more carbon atoms of which cyclic structure may be replaced by some other atom(s) or atomic group(s), or a dianil compound represented by the general formula (IV):



wherein X represents a hydrogen or halogen atom or a substituted amino group and L is an alkylene group which is required for the formation of a cyclic structure and may optionally be substituted, one or more carbon atoms of which cyclic structure may be replaced by some other atom(s) or atomic group(s), to condensation reaction in the presence of a fatty acid salt and a dehydrating organic acid.

8. (Pending) A near infrared absorber which comprises the polymethine compound of claim 1.

9. (Pending) An original plate for direct plating for printing comprising a light-to-heat conversion layer formed on a substrate, characterized in that said light-to-heat conversion layer contains the polymethine compound of claim 1.

10. (Pending) A method of making a printing plate which comprises irradiating the original plate for direct plating of claim 9 with a laser beam from a light source laser which has a light emission wavelength region within the range of 750 nm to 900 nm.

Status of Claims and Support for Claim

Changes under 37 C.F.R. § 1.173(c)

Regarding the status of the claims, all of claims 1-10 of USP 6,261,737 remain pending. These constitute all claims of this patent.

Support for the change to claim 7 is found at the corrected portions of column 5, lines 1-9 and column 39, lines 18-25 of USP 6,261,837 based on the corrections indicated in the enclosed Amendment Paper.